

DDI-1081-68

9 APR 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR: General Maxwell Taylor
Special Consultant to the President
Executive Office Building

SUBJECT: Status Report on Resolution of
Estimates of VC/NVA Strength

1. I want to give you some background on the development and the current status of estimates of Communist strength in South Vietnam. This will explain why it would be premature to attempt to present you with a detailed discussion of these estimates at this time.

2. During the past year various elements of the intelligence community in Washington and J-2, MACV, have been debating the strength of enemy forces. The debate culminated in an intelligence conference at Saigon in September 1967 that resulted in a series of agreed estimates, but this agreement was in fact an uneasy compromise that proved to be short lived.

3. I have become increasingly concerned that the strength of enemy forces was underestimated and that there were serious errors in the way the forces were characterized and in the way attrition was handled. MACV uses a series of tabulating methodologies which require "hard evidence" reflecting multiple confirmation before units are "accepted" in the order of battle.

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Although such methods ensure careful analysis at the working level, they tend to lag behind the actual events and to rule out early indications of build-up awaiting receipt of "hard evidence". This has been particularly true with regard to administrative service and guerrilla strengths, where the evidence is admittedly less conclusive than for Main and Local Force elements. As for the political infra-structure, our problem is to some extent one of clumsy definitions which encompass more than hard core leadership but exclude many full-time activists. Moreover, MACV is opposed to any quantified estimate of "irregulars". A basic difference derives from our effort to present the clearest reflection of all the evidence on the total enemy strength which frequently conflicts with MACV's OB statements based on more restrictive rules of evidence and scope.

4. Consequently, since the Saigon conference, my staff has been engaged in a rigorous examination of all available materials on enemy strengths. Our reassessment was well in hand at the time of the TET offensive, an event which made the need for an official reassessment more urgent and more obvious.

5. During the month of February, analysts from this Agency and DIA engaged in a series of working level discussions to consider the new CIA assessment. By the middle of March, MACV's application of TET losses to his rigorously defined and, I believe, understated OB widened the gap between Washington and Saigon. During this same period, the White House became concerned about the situation. After conversations with Mr. Rostow, on 17 March I directed my staff to prepare a report for publication and to make a concerted effort to secure DIA coordination and concurrence in the report.

6. On 4 April when it became clear that both CIA and DIA subscribed to the view that the MACV figures should be revised upwards substantially, I asked General Wheeler to inform both Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland of the developments in Washington. On 5 April I learned that a team from MACV and

CINCPAC would arrive in Washington this week to discuss CB matters. I saw this as an excellent opportunity to gather together all of the parties most directly concerned with the assessment of enemy strength and to mount a major effort to resolve this urgent problem of national intelligence. Accordingly, and with the agreement of DIA, I have ordered my Deputy Director for Intelligence to convene a conference at Langley on 10 April to discuss the military CB and the strength of enemy forces. When this conference has completed a detailed and thorough examination of a CIA draft assessment, the Chairman will make recommendations to me on the basis of these deliberations.

7. I know that you have a keen interest in this conference and I shall arrange for you to be briefed on its outcome as quickly as possible after I have considered the findings and recommendations of its Chairman.

Richard Helms
Director

cc: Director, DIA

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[Redacted Signature Box]

EDWARD W. PROCTOR
Acting DDI

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